

**Statement of Senator Bill Frist, M.D.  
Ranking Republican**

**Senate Subcommittee on Public Health  
Hearing on Bioterrorism  
Tuesday, October 9, 2001**

As America begins to strike back against Osama bin Laden, his terrorist cohorts, and the Taliban regime for the brutal assaults of September 11, today we face the possibility that a new front in the war on terrorism has opened at home. A second, potentially deadly case of anthrax discovered in Florida just yesterday.

Just as many of us never imagined that American commercial airliners would be converted into weapons of mass destruction, it is perhaps beyond the grasp of many that the weapons of choice in the first war of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century may be tularemia, smallpox, and anthrax. But this should come as no surprise. As we will hear today, the threats from biological and chemical agents are real. Terrorist groups have the resources and the motivation to use germ warfare. Osama bin Laden has said publicly that it is his religious duty to acquire weapons of mass destruction, including biological and chemical weapons. Rapid advances in agent delivery technology have made the weaponization of germs much easier. Finally, with the fall of the Soviet Union, the expertise of thousands of scientists knowledgeable in germ warfare may be available to the highest bidder.

Unfortunately, as we also will hear today, America is not yet fully prepared to meet the threat of biological warfare. Great strides have been made in the past three years; but there is much more to be done. Today some of the nation's leading experts on bioterrorism will help provide us further guidance as we prepare to meet this remote, but growing threat.

Today, we pray that the second man infected with inhalation anthrax will survive. And we all hope and pray that these two recent cases ultimately will be established as isolated incidents arising from a naturally occurring agent. But the fact remains that a biological or chemical attack on our soil could be even more deadly and destructive than the recent attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Without a substantial new federal investment in our public health infrastructure, increased intelligence and preventive measures, expedited development and production of vaccines and treatments, and constant vigilance on the part of our nation's health care workers, a terrorist attack using a deadly infectious agent—whether delivered through the air, through our foods, or by other means—could kill or sicken millions of Americans.

This Subcommittee began hearings during the 105<sup>th</sup> Congress, back in 1997, that culminated in the development and passage of the Public Health Threats and Emergencies Act of 2000. That law provides a coherent framework for responding to health threats resulting from bioterrorism. It authorizes a series of important initiatives to strengthen the nation's public health system, improve hospital response capabilities, upgrade the Centers for Disease Control's rapid identification and early warning systems, assure adequate staffing and training of health professionals to diagnose and care for victims of bioterrorism, enhance our research and development capabilities, and authorizes additional measures necessary to prevent, prepare, and respond to the threat of biological or chemical attacks.

Last week, Senator Kennedy and I asked the Administration and the Senate Committee on Appropriations to provide an additional \$1.4 billion for these activities; the vast majority of these funds would go toward a one-time investment in strengthening the response capabilities of our hospitals, health care professionals, and local public health agencies that would form the front-line response team in the aftermath of a bioweapon attack. I look forward to working with my colleagues in Congress, and with the Administration toward this goal.

It is essential that we take steps immediately to fill the gaps in our nation's defense and surveillance system against bioterrorism, as well as our public health infrastructure. The Subcommittee consulted closely with experts as we developed the Public Health Threats and Emergencies Act. Now, with the threat of bioterrorism increasing, it is critical that we return to these resources to help guide our next crucial steps.

I also would like to join Senator Kennedy in welcoming Senators Cleland, Hagel, Bayh, and Corzine to today's hearing. Their presence here is a heartening signal of the growing focus and commitment on the part of Congress to take the steps necessary this year to make sure that our nation is fully prepared to respond to any threat to our people.